

OFFICERS, BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

OFFICERS:

President Dr. Lloyd S. Bowling
Vice-President Mrs. Mary Beth Chandler
Recording Secretary Mrs. Vivian S. Malczyk
Corresponding Secretary Mrs. Diane Wimberly
Treasurer Mr. R. Wayne Winkler
Historian Mrs. Betty Levering

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Mrs. Michelle Bolton Mrs. Suzanne Luzier
Mr. Calvin Compton Mr. Robert Pender
Mrs. Patricia Day Mrs. Naomi Petrash
Mrs. Carol Donohue Mr. Tom Pike
Mrs. Susan Earle Mrs. Shirley H. Schindel
Mr. Philip Griffith

PAST PRESIDENTS:

* Mr. Bennett Crain, 62-63
Mr. Eugene A. Jenkins, Jr., 63-64, 66-67
Mr. H. Maxwell Mitchell, Jr. 64-66
* Mr. W. Preston Williams, 67-68
* Mr. John H. Mitchell, 68-70

*Mr. Watson M. Perrygo, 70-78
Mr. George C. Dyson, 78-82
Mr. William E. Garvey, Jr., 82-85
**Mr. Richard E. Heise, III, 85-86
Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., 86-92

(* deceased ** acting president)

COMMITTEES:

Arrangements:

Mrs. Michelle Bolton, *Chairperson* Mrs. Linda Hughes
Mrs. Susan Earle

Cemetery:

Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr., *Chairperson*
Mr. Gilbert Milstead Mrs. Anita L. Wood

Friendship House:

Facilities:
Mr. George C. Dyson, *Chairperson*

Furnishings:

Mrs. Shirley H. Schindel, *Chairperson*
Mr. Warren E. Barley

Museum: (vacant position)

Tours and Educational Programs:

Mrs. Shirley H. Schindel, *Chairperson* Mrs. Ann I. Liebrecht
Mrs. Elsie Dent Mrs. Teresa Mazzeo
Mr. Howard Dent Mrs. Jane Norfolk
Mrs. Lillian Beaulieu Mr. Robert Petrash
Mrs. Madelyn Griffith

Genealogy and Research:

Mrs. Ruby Dyson, *Chairperson*
Mrs. Mary Howard Critchell

Historic Sites:

Mrs. Edward C. Turner, *Chairperson*
Mrs. Ira Dell Newcomb

Historic Trust Representative: Mrs. Paula Winkler

Membership:

Mrs. Patricia Day, *Chairperson* (1)
Mr. George C. Dyson (2) Mrs. Mary Mauck (7)
Mrs. Vivian Malczyk (3) Mrs. Emma Middleton (8)
Mrs. Routh Chandler (4) Mrs. Olga S. Hamer (9)
Mrs. Sandra Mitchell (6) Ms. Eleanor Higdon (5)

Programs:

Mrs. Mary Beth Chandler, *Chairman* Mr. Michael J. Mazzeo, Jr.
Mrs. Sarah L. Barley Mrs. Anita Wood
Mrs. Carol Donahue

Projects:

Mrs. Susan Earle, *Chairperson* Mr. Philip Griffith

Publications:

(open) Editor *The Record*.
Mr. Joseph A. Diachenko, Editor *News & Notes*

Publicity: Mr. Tom Pike

Ways and Means:

Mrs. H. Maxwell Mitchell

Charles County Heritage Committee Representative:

Mrs. Carol Donohue

Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites Representative:

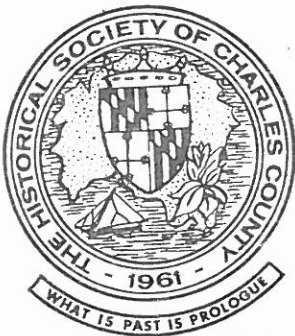
Mr. George C. Dyson

Small Museums Association Representative:

Mrs. Naomi Petrash

EDITOR'S NOTE

Articles of historic interest on Southern Maryland are requested for possible publication in future issues of **The Record**. Please send your typewritten manuscripts to: Publications, **The Record**, Box 261 Port Tobacco, MD 20677



The RECORD

Publication of The Historical Society of Charles County, Inc.

No. 78 April 1998

Dr. Lloyd S. Bowling, *President*

THE NAMING OF OUR COUNTY SCHOOLS

Newcomers to the county often wonder for whom a particular school was named or if it is not persons' name, its origin. Most of our county schools are named for individuals who figured prominently in history not only nationally, but some on a local level or perhaps on the state level. Other schools are named for locations. Starting with this issue of the Record, the Historical Society hopes to provide the readers with information pertaining to our county school names. Ultimately, this information will be presented to the individual schools in the county so that staff and students will be able to appreciate the origin of their school.

La Plata High School

La Plata High School takes its name from the surrounding town of La Plata, whose name originated with the Chapman family and their estate of Glen Albin in the mid nineteenth century.

John Grant Chapman, a U.S. Representative in the 29th and 30th Congresses, built a new plantation house close to the western edge of his Glen Albin lands. He called his home and the surrounding land La Plata. Later, he called his home La Plata Farm which stood just north of today's Walter J. Mitchell Elementary School. It is said that Chapman visited the area between Argentina and Uruguay in the nineteenth century and named his farm after South America's Rio del la Plata river which also has a town by the name of La Plata on its southern shore. Other historians have pointed out that the name could have derived from the French phrase, "le Plateau" which is used to describe level land. Although the schools through the years have bore the name of La Plata, it is not really known why Chapman decided to name his farm La Plata or who decided to name the town La Plata.

John Chapman's son, Robert Fergusson Chapman and two other local property owners, donated land to the new town. A one-room elementary school was

built on the property. The house and the school were destroyed by a tornado on November 9, 1926. Early in May of 1927, a building committee was organized to plan and consolidate a new grade and high school. That fall, the high school term began in the town hall and enrolled 90 students while the new school was being constructed on the site of the present County Government Building. Students and teachers began moving into the new building early in January of 1928. In September of 1964, new senior high opened on Oak Avenue with 1,000 students. The present La Plata High was built on Radio Station Road in 1979.

Somers Middle School

Milton Michael Somers was appointed principal of the La Plata High School in 1927. He remained as principal for 35 years. He was born near Crisfield on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. He graduated from Western Maryland College in 1920 and in 1924 received a law degree from the National University Law School. Until he came to La Plata in 1927, he was principal of Surratsville High School in Clinton, Maryland.

The teaching career of Milton M. Somers began in the Town Hall of La Plata and in January of 1928, he and the students moved into the new high school.

The Historical Society of Charles County

Post Office Box 261
Port Tobacco, Maryland 20677



Mr. & Mrs. Michael Mazzeo, Jr.
6795 Normadie Woods Dr.
LaPlata, MD 20646



There was a faculty of five and a student body of 224. By 1964, the student body had grown to more than 1700 with a faculty of 67. In 1943, while still principal, Milton M. Somers was also appointed high school supervisor for all the county high schools.

Among his many accomplishments, Milton M. Somers is credited with introducing marching bands with uniforms, extensive library collections, and a flag pole for each school in the county. He also saw value in annual proms for the students and is responsible for introducing the National Honor Society in the high schools.

Milton M. Somers was very interested in the physical well-being of the students. In addition to seeing that first-aid was available in the schools, he worked with the county health department in promoting inoculation against diphtheria. Further, he is credited with introducing dental clinics as well as vision and hearing screenings in the public schools.

The present Milton M. Somers Middle School was originally a high school of the same name.

Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School

Dr. Thomas L. Higdon was a physician who lived at Wayside in lower Charles County. He spent fifty years traveling that part of the county, treating the many citizens in the area. For most of his life, he was the only physician in that area.

Dr. Higdon was born on a farm called Planter's Delight on February 18, 1868. After completing grade school in the county, he attended Charlotte Hall Military Academy and upon graduation became a teacher in the Charles County Schools. He used the money he saved from teaching to attend Baltimore University Medical School from which he graduated in 1897.

His practice was carried on in his home, *Pleasant View*, but he treated patients from Rock Point to La Plata, a distance of approximately 25 miles. A large part of his practice consisted of making house calls. It

was a large area and the roads were unpaved. Dr. Higdon spent much of his time traveling to his patients. Sometimes he would ride his horse and buggy to the water's edge where he would be met by fisherman in a boat to take him to Cobb Island which had no bridge until 1920. He often dispensed medical advice after church on Sundays.

There was a charge of \$1.00 for an office visit, however, he often received goods instead of money and many times he received nothing. Dr. Higdon worked without the benefit of a hospital or laboratory. The seriously ill were sent by train to Washington or Baltimore until the hospital was built in La Plata in 1939.

Throughout his life, he was involved with promoting better education in Charles County. He was a member of the Charles County School Board for approximately ten years and was influential in establishing Glasva High School.

Maurice J. McDonough High School

On April 16, 1978, Maurice J. McDonough High School was dedicated on 52 acres of land in Pomfret, west of La Plata. McDonough was an Irish immigrant who landed in New England and moved to Pomfret prior to the American Revolution. He operated a small store where local farmers and veterans of the revolution gathered to discuss issues. He would read the news to them from the *Maryland Gazette*, realizing unhappily how few of his neighbors could read or write.

He died in 1804, leaving his assets to his wife, with the stipulation that at her death, the farm was to be sold and the money used to help the indigent children in Charles County. When his wife died in 1807, the trustees converted the assets to cash amounting to approximately \$3,000 and placed it in a trust.

The money was originally used to help fund teachers for some of the schools in the county. Just after 1900, when the county public school systems created the one and two-room elementary schools, the money

was used to establish the McDonough Institute in La Plata which constituted the first high school in Charles County. When Charles County started to build its own high schools, the McDonough Institute was sold, and the proceeds of the trust have since been used to support college educations for local students.

By the creation of this trust, which by today's standards was small but in 1807 significant, Maurice McDobough has contributed educational benefits for students in Charles County for almost 200 years.

Dr. Gustavus Brown Elementary School

Gusatavus Richard Brown was born in Charles County, Maryland October 17, 1747. His father, also a physician, came to Maryland in May of 1708 and practiced in Nanjemoy.

The younger Brown attended the University of Edinburgh in Scotland from which he received the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1768. In 1788, Dr.

Brown was appointed member of the Maryland Convention which ratified the federal constitution. He was also one of the one hundred one founders of the Medical and Chirurgical (Surgical) faculty of Maryland in 1799.

Dr. Brown's home, *Rose Hill*, stands directly at the head waters of Port Tobacco Creek. It is one of America's outstanding early Georgian homes. Though he owned *Rose Hill*, he was a popular physician and a man of wealth and prominence in local affairs. Dr. Brown is remembered chiefly because he was a Medical consultant to President George Washington in his last illness.

Dr. Brown left home at eight o'clock on the morning of December 14, 1799 and arrived at Mt. Vernon at noon. along with Drs. Craik and Dick, they attended President Washington until his death at approximately four that afternoon. The practice at that time was to bleed patients to rid them of the disease of which they were afflicted. Dr. Brown arrived after the last bleeding and was consulted with the possibility that a tracheotomy might help save Washington's life.

(Future issues of *The Record* will carry descriptions of the other schools in Charles County)